

Revelations by the Queen of the Underworld



Margaret Hill, the Famous "Vamp," Wrote Partnership with the Aristocrats of the Underworld Trapping Millionaires, Exploited "Chicago May's" Love Freed Eddie from Devil's Island--and How He Was Punished for His Ingratitude

"Chicago May" Churchill, the Devoted Friend, Who Arranged the Escape of Eddie Guerin from His Living Death on Devil's Island--and Who Quarreled with Him After His Escape.

By Mrs. Margaret Hill
CHAPTER XVII.

(Continued from Last Sunday)

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IN previous chapters of my story I have called crime a business. It is organized like any other profession. In several American cities there are schools in which crime is taught as freely as book-keeping and stenography. There are schools for safe blowing, schools for forgers and for many other branches of criminal industry.

The parallel between the business man and the crook extends into the criminal's career. He is worried by the same problems that beset the honest business man. He must keep his credit good among the money lenders, who finance his escapades, and the professional bondsmen, who buy his release from jail. He must reckon with a certain percentage of failures. He worries about overhead expense and how to reduce it.

There is only one worry of the crook that the business man does not share. That is the everlasting shadow of the penitentiary, which is the criminal equivalent of business bankruptcy and ruin. Many of my readers may think that a prison sentence is merely an incident in the life of a professional criminal. On the contrary, it is a disaster. Burglars and pickpockets and thugs and all the other petty rascals of their class accept a few years in the penitentiary as a matter of course. But the aristocrats of the Underworld hate prisons as they hate poison. To them prison means work, poverty and disgrace. When they are released they fall into the ex-convict class, known to the police and public. Their chances of future success are ruined, and all of them would willingly give their bottom dollar to escape one day behind the bars.

That is the reason that all crooks de luxe have somewhere within easy reach an emergency fund that corresponds to the business man's working capital. This money, usually in \$100 bills, is hidden away in the

safety deposit vaults of some reliable bank. It is never deposited. That might lead to capture.

For the same good reason all successful criminals retain the best criminal lawyer available, just as the capitalist retains the best corporation lawyer. When the crook is finally trapped, it is the lawyer's business to find bail and "spring" his man, as the process of release is called.

Of course, all this takes a great deal of money--sometimes the crook's last cent--but it is worth it. No real professional can bear to think of having his head shaved and being herded with the common people for a "stretch" of several years. And the thought of getting callouses on his well-manicured hands is terrible indeed to the aristocratic confidence man or blackmailer.

I know of only one high-class criminal who didn't mind jail. That was "Gentleman Joe" Faber, whose specialty was forging checks for large amounts, and whose misfortune was that he went too far one day and landed in Joliet penitentiary.

Now, to my mind there is nothing so petty as forging a check; and yet "Gentleman Joe" made it a fine art. He was far and away the smoothest forger on record, and certainly ten years ahead of his game.

His trick was to walk into a large metropolitan bank during the crowded hour of noon, all dressed up like the King of England, with yellow gloves, pink spats, stick and high silk hat.

Humphreys, my companion in the Underworld, told me some interesting examples of his smooth work.

One day Joe, dressed within an inch of his life, walked into this bank and explained to the paying teller that he had a certified check for \$15,000 that he wanted to cash in a hurry. He did not show the check, merely thumbing through his wallet as an indication that it was there.

The paying teller was impressed by Gentleman Joe's distinguished bearing, but checks for \$15,000,



Charlie Smith, Who Shot Eddie Guerin and Probably Saved "Chicago May's" Life.

even, when they are certified, are never cashed without the approval of the cashier; and the teller told Joe just that. He pointed out the cashier, who was sitting at his desk behind a marble counter near the paying teller's cage.

Joe apologized and elbowed through the crowd to the cashier's desk. He smiled his gracious smile,

and introduced himself as Walter P. Flint, of the firm of J. P. Morgan & Co., New York. The cashier was glad to meet Mr. Flint. Before the eyes of the vigilant teller, who, of course, could not hear a word of what was going on, he rose and shook hands with enthusiasm, asking Joe what he could do for him.

"I'm looking for the Merchants' National Bank," said Joe. "Can you direct

me and give me the name of the cashier over there?"

Now, there was certainly nothing suspicious about this. The cashier was more than willing to answer this casual question.

"I wonder if you would mind jotting that down?" asked Joe amiably. "I have the worst memory in the world."

The paying teller saw the cashier scribble something. He did not see that he was writing on ordinary memorandum paper, and naturally assumed that he was indorsing Joe's check.

"Gentleman Joe's" "Smooth Work" with Certified Checks

Mr. Flint smiled and shook hands again. He sailed through the crowd out of the busy cashier's sight and mind and doubled back to the window of the paying teller. There he produced the "certified check," on which the cashier's O. K. and initials had been forged the evening before.

How had he known what the cashier's handwriting was like? In one of a dozen ways--by signatures on bonds of the bank, by letters cunningly gotten, by what are called "cashier's" checks--oh, fully a dozen ways. The little by-play with the cashier was simply to lull any suspicious teller might have and to head him off from verifying the O. K. And the teller, after seeing what he had seen, looked casually at the cashier's O. K. and initials across one corner of the check and cashed it without hesitation. He thought it was as good as gold--until the next day.

The trick was worked again and again, and soon Gentleman Joe had the means to justify his sobriquet. One day, however, he thought he could work the same trick for \$50,000. He discovered that he couldn't, and after he had spent all the money he had stolen on lawyers, he landed in Joliet prison for a six months' term in spite of everything. It was a light sentence, but the jury liked his nerve, and they were influenced by the fact that he hadn't succeeded in cashing the last check.

Joe landed in Joliet without a dime, and it looked like hard times. But with his delightful personality and expert knowledge of figures he soon had himself transferred to the bookkeeping department of the penitentiary, and then the fun began.

In a very short time Joe had more than \$60,000 tucked away in a safety deposit vault in Chicago, and if it hadn't been for his colossal check he would have had a quarter of a million before he was released. How? It was simple.

As the prison bookkeeper Joe kept the records of all the brooms, shoes, clothing, limestone and other products of prison labor that were sold outside the penitentiary. He soon discovered the possibility of forging new bills of lading, with the following results:

An old friend of his in Chicago received notice from the railroad which runs to the penitentiary that four carloads of shoes were on a siding in the freight yards, consigned to him from Joliet penitentiary. The friend, of course, had received word from Joe of what was doing, and that same day advertised anonymously that there would be a manufacturers' sale of shoes in the freight yards. The shoes brought \$22,000, half of which was credited to Joe's account.

Twelve car loads of brooms arrived three days later. They were advertised for sale, and all the blind men in Chicago came down to the railroad yards to bid. The blind men went their way, and Joe's accomplice divided \$4,000 more. It seemed too easy.

The experiment was repeated with a trainload of limestone, mined at the penitentiary quarry. This brought several thousand dollars more. Chairs, basket work and clothing followed, until the profits climbed to \$60,000 apiece and the penitentiary officials began to suspect something was wrong. Their customers were complaining that they were not getting their purchases.

"Another Week," Said the Warden, "and He'd Have Sold the Prison!"

It was some time before suspicion fell on Joe, as he had carefully filed away the duplicates of the correct bills of lading. When the railroad detectives exposed the trick the warden nearly had apoplexy, but there was nothing he could do. Joe's accomplice had escaped, and there was no record of the forged bills of lading. With nothing definite against him, Joe was discharged in the allotted six months.

"If that crook had been in here another week," said the warden, "he'd have sold the penitentiary!"

But the ingenuity of Gentleman Joe has few, if any, parallels. Prison means ruin to ninety-nine out of one hundred criminals, and you may be sure they take the most extreme precautions to stay out of jail. If they have plenty of money and a good lawyer who knows his business, this is fairly easy to do. For proof it would be interesting for some enterprising newspaper to publish the complete record of some well-known crook, like Fred Buckminster or Professor Joseph Weil, whose exploits I described in a previous chapter.

The reader would be surprised at the endless legal obstructions that have been cleverly interposed between this precious pair and the prison terms they so richly deserved.

But all the delays and habeas corpus writs and other devices by which skilful lawyers work hand in hand with the most notorious crooks at large are only possible in this country, with its lenient laws and innumerable legal subterfuges.

It is only when the prospect of fat pickings leads the crook to England or France that he runs a real risk. His money is of no use to him there. When he falls into the hands of Scotland Yard detectives or the French secret service police he is through--forever! And what a fate awaits him!

The machinery of the French courts is automatic and absolute. If the crook has committed some trivial crime he is clapped into prison without any delay. If he has murdered, his head is chopped off with the same absence of fuss or sentiment. If he has played for big stakes, as the aristocrats of the Underworld boast, the most horrible penalty of all is administered. He is sentenced to Devil's Island, the famous and feared convict colony a few miles off the east coast of Cayenne, in South America!

No amount of money, no lawyer's skill, can save him after he has reached this horror of the South Atlantic, for it is the boast of the French prison authorities that no man escapes from Devil's Island. And yet one man did escape, from that fever-ridden rock, as I will show later on.

The English, while a little more humane, are equally stern in the administration of justice. The other day a broken husk of a man stepped from the gang plank of the great ocean liner *Majestic* as it docked in New York harbor. He was haggard and prematurely bald, and looking at him it was hard for me to recognize that D'Artagnan of all international crooks, Charlie Smith. Fifteen years in an English prison, to which he had been sentenced for life, had broken his heart and health, and he was returning to his native land an old man.

I shall not betray the real name of Charlie Smith. I am too deeply indebted to him to break that confidence and bring disgrace to the honorable and aristocratic Virginia family to which he belongs. But it is significant that his release from jail was finally brought about through the intercession of Lady Astor,